United Nations A/C.4/54/SR.25

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
30 May 2000

Original: English

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 25th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 22 May 2000 at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Zackheos ..... (Cyprus)

Contents

Agenda item 90: Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

00-44209 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 90: Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects (*continued*) (A/54/839 and A/C.4/54/L.21)

1. **Mr. Zaki** (Egypt), Rapporteur of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, introduced the report of the Special Committee (A/54/839).

2. In its recommendations, the Special Committee stressed the importance of consistently applying the principles and standards it had set forth for the establishment and conduct of peacekeeping operations and the need to continue to consider those principles, as well as peacekeeping definitions, in a systematic fashion. The Special Committee believed that respect for the basic principles of peacekeeping, such as the consent of the parties, impartiality and the non-use of force except in self-defence, was essential to its success.

3. The question of consultations had received significant attention in the working group. The Special Committee stressed the need, in the case of upcoming operations or the expansion of existing operations, to invite prospective troop contributors to take part in consultations with the Security Council at the earliest possible stage to enable them to make an informed decision on participation.

4. Another area to which the Special Committee attached importance was the safety and security of United Nations personnel. Peacekeeping operations must be provided with clear mandates and adequate resources and appropriate protection and security measures should be included in mission design and planning. The Special Committee encouraged the Secretariat to work on the review of the safety and security of United Nations personnel in peacekeeping operations.

5. The integration of civilian police in peacekeeping operations was another key topic discussed in the working group. The Secretariat should develop draft guidelines regarding the role of United Nations civilian police as soon as possible, in close consultation with Member States. Such guidelines should be in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international law.

6. With regard to standby arrangements and rapid deployment, the Special Committee noted that the United Nations rapid deployment capability was a comprehensive concept and that both Member States and the Secretariat shared responsibility for its effectiveness.

7. On issues related to logistics and procurement, the Special Committee stressed the importance of timely, efficient, transparent and cost-effective procurement of goods and services and invited the Secretariat to explore means of enhancing the logistics readiness of the Organization.

8. While noting the important contributions that regional arrangements and agencies could make to peacekeeping, the Special Committee emphasized that in accordance with Articles 53 and 54 of the Charter, no enforcement action should be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council and that the Council should be kept fully informed of activities undertaken or contemplated by regional arrangements or agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security.

9. Lastly, with regard to the timely issuance of the progress report, the Special Committee requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on progress made in the implementation of its recommendations contained in document A/54/839, on which specific reports had not been requested, six weeks prior to its 2001 session.

10. He then introduced draft resolution A/C.4/54/L.21 on behalf of its sponsors. After reading out minor drafting changes, he said that the draft was largely similar to the previous year's resolution. It contained a number of preambular paragraphs relating to the Special Committee's mandate and its role in enhancing the Organization's capacity and performance in peacekeeping operations. The operative paragraphs endorsed the proposals and recommendations of the Committee and urged all relevant bodies and organs to implement them.

11. The sponsors hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted without a vote.

12. *Draft resolution A/C.4/54/L.21, as orally amended, was adopted.*

13. **Mr. Miyet** (Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations) said that the annual meeting

of the Special Committee represented an invaluable opportunity to strengthen the consensus that was crucial for the success of United Nations peacekeeping. The Secretariat welcomed the chance to learn the concerns and interests of Member States, to convey its own immediate needs and to work together to seek new solutions.

14. A new timetable had been agreed on whereby the Special Committee's recommendations would be approved in the spring. That was necessary to allow for the rapid implementation of decisions. Progress towards the implementation of those recommendations would be reviewed with the Fourth Committee when it met in the fall. While looking forward to that discussion, he wished to make some initial comments at the current meeting.

15. With reference to Mr. Zaki's statement concerning the need to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel and to provide peacekeeping missions with clear mandates and adequate resources, the Secretariat was especially mindful of those principles at the time. The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) had gone through an acute crisis in recent weeks, and it was necessary to draw the lessons of that experience. The first lesson was that, in spite of certain statements made to the press, the troops serving under the United Nations flag had displayed astonishing courage and determination. It should not be forgotten that for the first time in 10 years, foreigners had entered the zones controlled by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The troops deployed in those areas, particularly the Kenyans and the Indians, had never surrendered and had responded when attacked. In particular, the Kenyans had refused to hand over the first RUF combatants who had gone to the disarmament camps of their own accord. The troops had broken the blockade set up by RUF combatants. Thus, contrary to what some might believe, the troops had never been overwhelmed and the countries concerned had never fled from their responsibilities. Moreover, during the entire period, no civilians had been killed in Freetown, except during the demonstration outside Foday Sankoh's house, nor had any civilians been wounded, beaten or raped. The blue helmets, mainly Jordanian and Nigerian troops, had remained at their posts in Freetown and at the airport in Lungi and had prevented the recurrence of the tragic events of January 1999.

16. The second lesson was that, despite the references made to Rwanda, Bosnia and Somalia, civilians had never paid a price for the operation and the United Nations had never been guilty of abandoning the population. What was more, even at the height of the crisis, the troop-contributing countries, including those whose soldiers were most at risk, had never threatened to withdraw them and had, in fact, expressed their willingness to send reinforcements. That was true not only of the States members of the Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group (ECOMOG), but also of India, Jordan and Bangladesh. He paid tribute to those countries for their remarkable support.

17. A third important element was that the Security Council itself, which had been hesitant in the past, had been concerned with showing its support throughout the crisis and had demonstrated it again on 19 May by increasing the size of the contingent from 11,100 to 13,000 troops.

18. To be sure, a number of questions had been raised, and had been echoed by the press on several occasions, such as whether it had been wise to launch the operation in Sierra Leone and whether it would be advisable to proceed with the mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It had also been suggested that, after a peace agreement was signed by the parties, the United Nations should not intervene for some months or years later, until it was certain that the parties were really committed to the peace process. Doubts had been expressed as to whether the commitments would really be honoured where the parties were not States but guerrilla movements with varying degrees of organization and discipline. It had been suggested that where the Security Council had doubts or suspicions of that nature, it should not take the kind of risk that might prove decisive in the situation.

19. It was self-evident that, where a degree of risk existed, that should be taken into account in the definition of the mandate and the provision of resources. In the case of Sierra Leone, a force of 11,100 troops had been regarded as adequate for the risk involved. In fact, at the time when that decision had been taken, questions had been raised in the press as to whether the size of the force was not excessive. In the end, the reactions of the RUF and the difficulty of predicting what its movements might be had made it

necessary to envisage a second increase, from 13,000 to 16,500 troops.

20. While the Secretariat was aware of a number of weaknesses, it was very grateful to the countries that had not traditionally contributed large numbers of troops for the efforts they had made. It should now be possible to strengthen the peacekeeping capacities of all countries, especially African countries, to enable them to participate in peacekeeping operations not only in Africa, but also on other continents.

21. Another lesson was that it was necessary to avoid reacting too quickly. The reality of the situation on the ground should always be kept in mind. That was true both for the Mission and for the press. In Freetown, which was cut off from the rest of the country, many people reacted to fragmentary and unverified information from the field. That had increased the tension and the pressure, and everything had been exacerbated by the terrible memory of what had happened a year earlier. The Mission was now prepared to make a fresh start with support from the troop-contributing countries and the Security Council.

22. The report included a number of positive recommendations related to practical aspects of peacekeeping. He greatly appreciated the Special Committee's focus on ways to enhance the Secretariat's ability to find the personnel and resources required in the field. The Kosovo and East Timor missions were not yet fully staffed. His Department had difficulty in defining what posts were needed in Kosovo and East Timor, which ones could be filled by local personnel and which ones would require the recruitment of international staff. Ongoing efforts on the part of both the Secretariat and Member States would be needed to address those issues.

23. The report also identified a number of key conceptual areas where further progress was required. His Department had already advanced considerably in addressing one of the most complex issues raised in the report, namely, the formulation of guidelines on the role of United Nations civilian police.

24. As mentioned in paragraph 134 of the report, the Government of Spain had hosted a meeting of former police commissioners in Avila on 4 and 5 May. The Secretariat was still absorbing the insights provided on that occasion; consideration was being given to holding another seminar on the same topic in July.

25. The 14 United Nations operations currently deployed were discharging difficult and complex tasks. Some were treading uncharted territory in addressing underlying problems of law and order or human rights. If peacekeeping was to achieve its potential, the Secretariat and Member States must work in partnership to ensure that the Organization retained the capacity to act quickly and effectively in promoting international peace and security.

26. **Mr. Rowe** (Sierra Leone) said that during the emergency debate which the Security Council had held on Sierra Leone earlier that month, his delegation had been encouraged by the assurances from members and non-members of the Council that the Organization would not abandon the people of his country. His delegation had noted with satisfaction that a consensus existed that the United Nations should continue to fulfil its commitment to the country. In his statement the Secretary-General had promised that additional troops were on their way, and that when all of them had arrived, the military component of UNAMSIL would probably exceed the maximum authorized by the Council earlier in the year. The Secretary-General had also expressed the hope that the Council would set a more generous limit.

27. Days later that promise had been fulfilled. The Council had approved an increase in the troop strength of UNAMSIL, to 13,000. His delegation commended the Secretary-General on his initiative and persistence and expressed its sincere thanks to the troop-contributing countries, especially those whose contingents had endured physical and emotional indignities at the hands of the rebels while performing their peacekeeping duties.

28. The Council's decision should come as a disappointment to those who had expected the United Nations to withdraw from Sierra Leone. The Council had sent a clear message to the RUF and others that it would not be deterred by terrorism and intimidation. UNAMSIL was not the only United Nations presence in the country. Other agencies and organizations were performing humanitarian, economic and social development and nation-building tasks in Sierra Leone, for which its people were grateful.

29. The Government and people of his country had been disappointed at the action and inaction which had precipitated the illegal detention of UNAMSIL personnel by RUF rebels. His delegation, however,

wished to say to all those who were assessing the role of UNAMSIL that the recent incidents should in no way be interpreted as a failure of United Nations peacekeeping in Africa. Such a conclusion was a great disservice to those countries which had responded to the Security Council resolutions calling for the establishment of the Mission by sending their own nationals to serve under the United Nations flag. Neither the troop-contributing countries nor the United Nations had failed in Sierra Leone. What had happened so far should be regarded as a lesson, albeit a painful one.

30. While there were common denominators to all peacekeeping operations, each one was different. Sierra Leone was not Somalia, southern Lebanon or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Each situation must be treated in accordance with its own circumstances.

31. In the final analysis, the success or failure of peacekeeping operations would be determined by the readiness of combatants like the RUF to abide by their commitments. It would also be determined by the extent to which the Organization was prepared to adapt its peacekeeping concepts, its perceptions regarding armed conflicts and its mandates and rules of engagement to the situation on the ground in each theatre of operation.

32. While expressing the hope that the Council's recent action would go a long way towards easing the current situation, his delegation trusted that the Council would not hesitate to respond speedily and effectively in the event of any further breach of the peace by the RUF and its internal and external allies.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.